

may have been motivated in part by a desire to leave a historic legacy, but as one of the savvyest politicians ever to occupy the Oval Office he long ago figured out there were far better ways to do that than by plunging into the Middle East morass.

Look instead to his relationship with the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who brought the completed Oslo agreement to Clinton with an appeal for help in implementing it. Clinton promised to minimize the risks for Israel and help smooth out the rough decisions. After Rabin's assassination, Clinton's commitment became a mission.

He can be faulted for pushing too long and too hard, especially after it should have been clear that he wanted peace more than the parties themselves, particularly Yasser Arafat.

He wrongly relied on Ehud Barak's faulty political instincts and novice politician's enthusiasm. The President ignored the advice of his own advisors, the Palestinians and some Israelis when he bowed to Barak's desire to convene last summer's abortive Camp David summit.

More recently, he has been trying to salvage a last minute agreement before leaving office—failing or refusing to hear the window of opportunity slam shut.

Clinton consistently overestimated his ability to affect Arafat's behavior, and he may have badly miscalculated the level of the Palestinian leader's commitment to a genuine peace.

Clinton has succeeded on so many fronts by dint of charm and personality, and he thought he could do it with Arafat as well. No other foreign leader has been to the White House as often, and Clinton's mistaken failure to demand Arafat pay more for that access only encouraged the Palestinian leader's obstinacy.

"He played Clinton Masterfully," said a former White House official. "Clinton felt he was giving peace every chance, but, like Rabin, Peres and Barak, he failed to hold Arafat's feet to the fire."

Clinton admonished Arafat in his speech earlier this month to Jewish leaders for fostering "the culture of violence and the culture of incitement." But his persistent reluctance to deal with Palestinian incitement was interpreted as a sign of weakness and may have fueled the current crisis.

Echoing a hopeful Israeli leaderships, he wrongly expected Israel's surprisingly forthcoming offers would elicit positive responses. But his blindness to Arafat's faults and deceptions may have encouraged the semi-retired terrorist to cling more tightly to his maximalist demands and let the Israelis negotiate with each other and with the Americans.

American and Israeli insiders say Clinton never pushed Israel without being encouraged by leaders there to give them a nudge and some political cover for tough decisions. But at the same time, Clinton mistakenly listened too much to some of his left-leaning Jewish friends who gave him bad advice on such things as his wife's meeting with Mrs. Arafat and his counter-productive confrontations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

If Clinton was too intensely involved in the nitty gritty of the peace process, there is a greater risk that his successor will be too disengaged.

Whatever his shortcomings, there can be no questioning Clinton's commitment to Israel and its search for peace. He brought an unprecedented warmth and understanding, even as he demonstrated a genuine empathy for the Palestinians that won their trust.

A key to Clinton's winning the confidence of the Israelis and the vast majority of Jewish voters was his high comfort level with

the Jewish community at home. It is unmatched by any president, as is the affection and support he got in return.

That backing was bolstered by domestic policies that were in synch with most Jewish voters, particularly on issues such as church-state separation, civil liberties, reproductive rights, the environment, education and social welfare.

Jewish voters rewarded him and his vice president with nearly 80% of their votes in three national elections.

There were more Jewish officials at all levels of the Clinton administration than in any prior government; at one time there were six in Cabinet level posts, compared to none so far in the incoming Bush administration.

American Jews never felt on the outside during the Clinton years' that was particularly important since he followed a president who publicly questioned their patriotism.

He deserves enormous credit for his historic contribution to the struggle to bring a measure of justice to the survivors of the Holocaust after decades of frustration and inaction. His personal commitment and the intense involvement of his administration, particularly through the outstanding work of Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, helped end half a century of Swiss denial and stone-walling.

That personal involvement produced progress in such areas as the restitution of stolen property in other nations, compensation for slave and forced laborers, the settlement of insurance claims, the return of cultural artifacts and aid for the neediest of Hitler's remaining victims.

Credit is shared with an unlikely partner, former Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY). Although as chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, D'Amato was leading an investigation of the Clintons' Whitewater investments, both men rose above their political differences to cooperate fully in the Swiss investigations, realizing success beyond anyone's expectations.

Both the Administration and the Congress worked closely with the World Jewish Restitution Organization, representing both Israel and the diaspora, to bring about historic results.

I will leave it to others to chronicle Clinton's many shortcomings. I expect history will judge this flawed president more kindly than his contemporaries. He alone robbed his presidency of greatness as he demonstrated that in Washington most of the slings and arrows politicians suffer are self-inflicted.

But the Jewish community should be very grateful for his stewardship, for his dedication to assisting Israel in its search for peace, for his contribution to the survivors of the Holocaust and for his undeniable friendship.

HEALTH PREMIUMS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS SHOULD BE TAX DEDUCTIBLE ITEMS

HON. CLIFF STEARNS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today, I will reintroduce legislation to allow health insurance premiums and unreimbursed prescription drug expenses to be tax deductible. Last year's bill number was H.R. 4472.

Under current law, employers can write off the cost of health care coverage purchased for their employees. Why can't individuals also be afforded the same opportunity to write off their

premiums and unreimbursed prescription drug expenses? The current tax code sets the threshold at 7.5 percent of adjusted gross income before an individual can write off their medical expenses. That doesn't seem right to me.

Currently, in order to claim health care expenses an individual must file an itemized tax return. I believe that all taxpayers should be allowed to deduct these out-of-pocket costs and that we need to include a place where this deduction could be taken on the short form such as the 1040 EZ and 1040A.

My bill also applies to the self-employed because individuals who are self-employed will not be eligible for a 100 percent write off until 2003.

This type of relief is long overdue. Allowing individuals to write off certain costly health care expenses they may incur would be a tremendous benefit that may not be available under the current system.

The National Taxpayers Union (NTU) endorsed my bill in the last congress.

LET'S NOT FORGET OUR FRIENDS ON TAIWAN

HON. EVA M. CLAYTON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, as a new administration takes office, we wish to remind them and our colleagues in Congress that we must not forget our friends in the Republic of China on Taiwan. Let's not forget Taiwan has a democratically-elected president and a parliament that is fully committed to the free enterprise system, democracy, and human rights. Let us not forget that we need to give the Republic of China on Taiwan all the support she richly deserves.

As many of us know, Mr. Chen Shi-gian was elected president of the Republic of China last March and was inaugurated as President on May 20. He chose Dr. Hung-mao Tien as his Foreign Minister. Since assuming office in May, under the direction of President Chen Shui-bian, Foreign Minister Tien has clearly articulated Republic of China's foreign policy thrusts. Regarding the People's Republic of China, Minister Tien has made clear that peace and non-aggression are essential to ensure that the two entities engage in reasonable and responsible discussions. At the same time, President Chen has made a number of conciliatory gestures towards the mainland. Taiwan does not seek confrontation, but a friendly dialogue with mainland China leading to future talks on all issues, including eventual reunification.

In terms of solidifying friendship and ties with ROC's allies, President Chen and Minister Tien have traveled far and wide. Last year they completed a grueling 2-week journey of friendship to ROC's allies in Central America and Africa. Minister Tien also traveled to Europe to strengthen Taiwan's ties with friendly nations.

It is our understanding that to seek greater international recognition, Taiwan will continue to seek a return to the United Nations and other international organizations. It is our view that a worthy nation like Taiwan must be given its proper recognition in the community of nations.